

VZCZCXRO6840
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHRA #0165/01 0651205
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061205Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY RIGA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3832
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0021
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0014
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIGA 000165

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2012
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [NATO](#) [IZ](#) [AF](#) [LG](#)
SUBJECT: LATVIAN PLANS ON IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

REF: 06 RIGA 1056

Classified By: Ambassador Catherine Todd Bailey. Reason 1.4 (D)

11. (C) Summary: Recent decisions by the UK and Denmark to draw down their troops in Iraq, and suggestions that Lithuania may do the same, have had little impact in Latvia. The GOL continues with its plan, developed last fall and extensively briefed to partners, to make the current rotation of combat troops in Iraq its last, consistent with the handover to the Iraqis of responsibility for security in the areas where Latvian troops operate. When the current unit returns to Latvia in July, Latvia will retain a small number of personnel in MNF-I in headquarters positions and in the NATO training mission. Latvia plans to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan, but op tempo and logistical shortfalls mean that the largest increase in troops may not occur until early 2008. Resource constraints and political realities make it unlikely that Latvia will alter this plan. End summary.

12. (C) Latvia currently has about 110 combat troops in Iraq, serving with the Polish MND in Diyawaniyah. Latvia has participated in OIF since 2003 and in that period, three Latvians have been killed. The most recent casualties were in December, when two soldiers were killed by IED while on patrol (reftel). Last fall, as the Poles began to plan for the handover of security responsibilities to the Iraqis, Latvia saw a possibility to reconfigure its contribution to OIF. Frustrated at working with the Poles and noting the importance to NATO of the ISAF mission in the context of the NATO summit in Riga, the GOL decided it would send one last combat unit to Iraq and thereafter shift its efforts to ISAF. The unit currently deployed in OIF will return in July. Before announcing this decision, a Latvian delegation flew to Warsaw to brief the Poles and coordinate with them on the plan. The Latvians also feel that in meetings with USG officials, including when Def Min Slaketris saw then-SecDef Rumsfeld last July, we have not raised any objections to this plan and indicated our understanding that their posture in Iraq would change. The GOL has briefed both parliament and the public that this will be the last rotation of combat troops in Iraq, although it will continue to provide soldiers to MNF-I headquarters elements and participants in the NATO training mission in Iraq (NTM-I).

13. (C) The Latvians currently have 26 soldiers in ISAF serving as part of the Norwegian PRT in Maymana. They plan to increase that number to 72 by the end of August. They are willing to deploy as many as 150 troops to ISAF if the right fit can be found. The Latvians are willing to supply uncaveated troops and to serve in the south of the country, but for reasons of logistical support needs they need a partner nation and, thus far, have been unable to find one that would allow them to serve in the south. The logistical realities of shifting the focus of efforts from Iraq to

Afghanistan means that it will likely be early 2008 before Latvia could have its full deployment in ISAF.

14. (C) While increasing its military contribution to ISAF, Latvia is considering how to better contribute to the whole of government approach in Afghanistan that we have been advocating in NATO. Beginning later this year, Latvia will provide the political advisor to the head of the Norwegian PRT (although they are having some difficulties identifying a mid-level diplomat willing and able to serve in Afghanistan).

Latvia will also provide the assistance and development coordinator for the PRT. MFA sources tell us that they will look to find additional money in their budget to increase their development assistance in Afghanistan (without having to take from their priority countries of Moldova, Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine). Their recent NATO non-paper on building an information sharing database in Afghanistan (which the Latvians say received an enthusiastic reception from NATO SYG de Hoop Scheffer) highlights the enthusiasm for this mission within the bureaucracy. Finally, the Latvian interagency is working to deploy two police officers as part of the ESDP mission in Afghanistan.

15. (C) Comment: We believe that the Latvians are firmly fixed on this course. The Iraq deployment remains very unpopular, with polls consistently showing 80 percent public opposition.

While the vote in parliament last December to renew the mandate for participation in OIF was quite strong (69 in favor), we believe that this stemmed in large part from the fact that the government had already decided that there would only be one more deployment of combat troops. Additionally, MOD officials tell us that the Iraq mission, which is carried out solely by volunteers, has severely stressed the military, as the deployed unit is cobbled together from among those

RIGA 00000165 002 OF 002

willing to go. In fact, the current unit is short of full strength by a few soldiers as not enough were willing to go on this rotation and most of the ones there are on their second and third deployments. In contrast, the ISAF mission has much higher levels of public and political support and many more soldiers are willing to serve there. The ability to provide political guidance to the ISAF mission as a NATO member, in contrast to the Iraq mission, is also important to the Latvians. As the host of the NATO summit in November, the GOL, and especially President Vike-Freiberga, feels that Latvia must increase its ISAF contribution. The irony is that Latvia is willing to provide what many of the European allies are not - capable, uncaveated infantry troops, deployable anywhere in Afghanistan. But to do that, they need a partner nation to assist with the logistical needs for which Latvia lacks economies of scale. They will likely stay with the relatively safe Norwegian PRT unless another partner nation can be found.

BAILEY